



# OFFICE OF DEMOCRATIC LEADER NANCY PELOSI

## FACT SHEET

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### **Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization**

Today, Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI) is introducing in the House the Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization, which is very similar to the version reported by the Senate Judiciary Committee in February.

This bill reauthorizes the critical Violence Against Women Act programs—such as STOP Grants, Transitional Housing Assistance Grants, legal assistance for victims, and many more—that have allowed victim service providers, law enforcement officers, and prosecutors to keep victims out of harm's way and hold perpetrators accountable. In addition, the legislation makes important, overdue improvements that reflect what we now recognize as effective “best practices:” a new focus on sexual assault prevention and services, tools to prevent domestic violence-related homicides, new rules extending the authority of tribal courts over domestic violence matters involving Native American victims, an increased number of U Visas (for abused undocumented women who cooperate with law enforcement), expanded protections for victims in federal housing programs, and expanded services for traditionally underserved communities.

Following is an overview of the provisions of the reauthorization bill.

#### **VAWA-funded programs have dramatically improved the national response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.**

- VAWA has improved the criminal justice system's ability to keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable. As a result of this historic legislation, every state has enacted laws making stalking a crime and strengthened criminal rape statutes. The annual incidence of domestic violence has dropped more than 50% since VAWA became law.
- VAWA programs have provided victims with critical services such as transitional housing, legal assistance, and supervised visitation services. They address the unique barriers faced by rural victims, elderly victims, and those with disabilities.
- Since VAWA was originally enacted, reporting of domestic violence has increased as much as 51%. More victims are coming forward and receiving lifesaving services to help them move from crisis to stability.
- VAWA has successfully encouraged communities to coordinate their responses to violence against women by bringing together victim advocates, law enforcement, the courts, health care professionals, and leaders within faith communities.
- But more work remains. The CDC's 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that 1 in 4 women have been the victim of severe physical domestic violence and 1 in 5 women have been raped in their lifetime.

#### **VAWA Reauthorization strengthens and streamlines crucial existing programs.**

- Renews Successful Programs – This bill reauthorizes important programs – including STOP Grants, Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforcement of Protection Orders Program, Transitional Housing Assistance

Grants, legal assistance for victims, youth prevention programs, and many others – that have helped law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim service providers keep victims safe and hold perpetrators accountable.

- Consolidation – VAWA Reauthorization consolidates programs to reduce administrative costs and avoid duplication. It consolidates 13 existing programs, many of which overlap, into four.
- Reduced Authorization – To acknowledge current fiscal realities, this legislation reduces authorizations by 17 percent from the 2005 reauthorization. It reduces or keeps even the authorization for every VAWA program, eliminates or consolidates several, and adds only one small new grant program.
- Accountability – VAWA Reauthorization incorporates new accountability provisions, patterned after those Senator Grassley added to the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act and other bills, but tailored to fit VAWA programs. They include strict new audit requirements, enforcement mechanisms for grantees that fail to fix problems found in the audits, restrictions on grantees' executive compensation and investments and their administrative costs – all aimed to ensure that VAWA funds are used wisely and efficiently.

#### **VAWA Reauthorization incorporates new approaches to more effectively combat violence.**

- Focus on Sexual Assault – Recognizing the continuing crisis of inadequate reporting, enforcement, and services for victims of sexual assault, VAWA Reauthorization includes measures to ensure an increased focus on sexual assault prevention, enforcement, and services, including:
  - New purpose areas in key programs to improve law enforcement and forensic responses to sexual assault and to address backlogs of untested rape kits; and
  - A requirement that 20% of STOP State formula grant program funds and 25% of funds in Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforcement of Protection Orders Program be allocated for sexual assault-related programs.
- Homicide Reduction – The bill provides tools and encourages best practices, which have been proven to be effective, to prevent domestic violence homicides by training law enforcement, victim service providers, and court personnel to identify and connect high-risk victims to crisis intervention services.
- Violence Against Native Women – VAWA Reauthorization addresses the crisis of violence against women in tribal communities, who face rates of domestic violence and sexual assault much higher than those faced by the general population, by strengthening concurrent tribal criminal jurisdiction over those who assault Indian spouses and dating partners in Indian country, clarifying jurisdiction for civil protection orders, improving grant programs to help tribal communities, and strengthening assault statutes.
- Increase in U Visas to Assist Law Enforcement – The U Visa program, created by VAWA 2000, allows law enforcement to request visas for victims who are helping them investigate serious crimes. This bill adds stalking to the list of enumerated crimes for which a U visa is available. It also allows for up to 5,000 additional visas to be drawn, at law enforcement request, from a pool of previously authorized but never issued U Visas. Law enforcement has requested this modest increase because the current cap of 10,000 has been reached the past two years, making it more difficult for them to pursue cases against dangerous perpetrators that they could otherwise reach. This increase is supported by the Department of Homeland Security, Fraternal Order of Police, National Sheriffs' Association, National District Attorneys Association, and National Association of Attorneys General.

**VAWA Reauthorization takes new steps to reach all victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking who need help.**

- Housing Protections – The bill ensures that housing protections reach a broader group of victims by applying existing housing protections to nine additional federal housing programs. These protections are designed to ensure that victims do not lose housing benefits as a result of their victimization.
- Expanded Services for Underserved Communities –VAWA Reauthorization attempts to ensure that VAWA programs reach more communities whose members need services. It expands the definition of “underserved” to include religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity to encourage development of services for people who have had trouble getting help in the past based on those categories. It also includes new purpose areas to ensure that grant funds can be used to make services available for all victims regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Civil Rights Protection – The bill includes a civil rights provision which guarantees consistent application of civil rights protections to all VAWA programs, in place of the patchwork of inconsistent civil rights protections currently in place, and ensures that no victim can be denied services based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability.